THE RELATION

BETWEEN

ETHICS AND RELIGION:

AN ADDRESS

AT THE

OPENING OF THE SESSION 1881-2

OF

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

BY

JAMES MARTINEAU, LL.D., D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE COLLEGE.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
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THE RELATION BETWEEN ETHICS AND RELIGION.

CHRISTENDOM, through all its vicissitudes, has preserved a distinctive moral physiognomy, giving to its history and literature an interest very different from that which attaches to Pagan times. Its eye has been fixed on an image of perfection variously unlike the heroes and sages of Greece and Rome. But, notwithstanding this practical unity of moral reverence through eighteen centuries, the attitude of the Christian Church towards the theoretic study of Ethics is marked by striking contradictions. It was impossible for the priesthood to work the system of *Confession*, and save it from a chaos of discrepancies, without classifying and assimilating decisions distant in time and place, and gradually eliciting, from this mass of *case-law*, a body of principles and rules applicable to the whole contents of human temptation and perplexity. Through her library of Casuistry, the Catholic Church has become the parent of our modern Moral Philosophy, and has conveyed into it her own assumption that the right guidance of life is inseparable from the functions of religion. On the other hand, Luther, denying all religious value to Morals, flung them, as a mere

matter of police, into the hands of the civil magistrate. And the first volume of the "Congregational Lectures" instituted about half a century ago was written to prove that Christianity repudiates Ethics as *ab initio* impossible to the vitiated reason and conscience of a fallen nature. The study thus ignominiously cast out to the "infidel," he in his turn is very ready to pick up, all the more from its being unencumbered with theology. He has quite a right to take these divines at their word and refute them by effecting, if he can, on independent ground, the construction which is declared impossible. We cannot be surprised that the supercilious airs of the religious towards Morals should in due season be assumed by the moralist towards Religion; and that, at least in the high moods of both, a divorce should be agreed upon as the only end of strife. And so we see offended Philosophy building its palace and setting up its separate establishment as far as possible from the Church, without even a window looking upon the Abbey towers. A quiet observer who loves them both may hold his peace and be content with his own sorrow at their averted looks; but may well doubt whether a wedlock beginning with the devout enthusiasm of youth, consecrated by long fellowship in trial and in victory, and attested by noble offspring that bear the features of both parents, can be permanently repented of; and will rather believe that, when the crisis of hurt pride and harassed spirits has passed, returning memories will draw from each, unconfessed to the other, frequent tears of reconciliation. Some natural feeling of this kind with regard to the present alienation between Ethical doctrine and Religious, suggests to me a few remarks on the real relation between the two.

Ethics treat of the right-ordering of Personal Relations, so far as these may be made better or worse by our will.

The terms of this definition, though not obscure, it may be well to unfold by a few words of comment.

Personal Relations constitute the prior condition and very matter itself of Morality, and in their absence it has no room to be. An absolutely solitary individual, if invested with power of various action and disposition, might affect himself for better or worse by what he did, but would be subject to no obligation and incur no guilt. The harm he occasioned would be a blunder and not a sin: the good which he earned would prove his wisdom, not his virtue. If, instead of being lonely on the field of life, he has companions sentient but only animal, he enters on semi-personal relations and wakes to the first rudiments of Duty; the sensibilities of the creatures around him stirring in him two or three of the springs of action, whose relative worth, when more largely realized, fills up the contents of Conscience. Though his companions are not his peers, related to him as he is to them, yet it is in virtue of what they have in common with human nature that they are qualified to teach him the first lesson of Character.

Where the two natures are thus unequal, the morality which is rendered possible by their presence together is obviously limited to that one which is personal: the other is the occasion of duty in him without becoming liable to any reciprocal obligation. A parrot, kindly and rightly treated by his owner, will repay the pains bestowed on his education by amusing accomplishments and friendly ways. But these habits, moulded by the discipline of pleasure and pain, have not the ethical quality with which the master's

action is tinctured; being no objects of ideal choice, but outwardly shaped by application of the physiological forces which dispose of the organism. The mere capacity of an animal for being "broken in," i.e. for being modified in its action through fear and hope, does not constitute personality or confer responsibility; and no integral moral relation arises until both natures are homogeneous and both personal.

Hence it follows that the relation, as ethically regarded, includes, besides the adjustment of external action, an indispensable concomitant of internal thought or feeling: for it is just here, i.e. in the absence of preferential consent or intention, that the animal obedience is defective. To say that *personal* relations are essentially *mental* relations, is to say that the essential business of Ethics is with the *inner springs of action.*

Once more: our definition presupposes that the personal relations "may be made better or worse by our will." If I am master of no such alternative, if at each moment only one thing is possible to me, or if, out of two, neither is better than the other, I am the subject simply of natural law, not of moral. Differences of tendency may still be the object of scientific investigation, like differences of stature or digestion: but there is nothing to distinguish the study of what *ought to be* from the study of what *is;* and Ethics pluck up their fence and surrender their field to psychology,—unless indeed the biologist, who has long been squatting there, has already got too firm a hold.

Now, for Ethics thus defined I do not ask for any other place of birth and exercise than the common life of persons together; i.e. a human Society. That scene contains within

itself adequate provision for their growth in individuals and their consolidation into Law: there is no need for them to be superimposed *ab extra*, added on as an appendix to the constitution of the world, as if they had been forgotten or too little emphasized in its substantive design. Whoever thinks, by insisting on such a supplement to an original humanity, to win a celestial sanctity for the law of righteousness, defeats his own object: he parts the two elements which he wishes to blend, and by way of making Religion necessary makes Morals impossible. For, to a nature from which Conscience has been omitted, no Law can ever be sacred, no right and wrong ever be revealed. It may be externally reduced to rule: but whatever conformity with order is thus produced is worthless as the genuflexions of an automaton or the mimicry of an ape: whatever is willed on other grounds than its inherent excellence is foreign to the sphere of character. Without inward appreciation of that excellence in its several degrees and consenting adoption of it for its own sake, goodness cannot be: and if a Creator, in projecting a moral world, should omit to render this appreciation immanent in the nature of its people, no repairing message could overtake the defect. Thunders of command, tables of law, oracles of instruction, may terrify their imagination, engage their memory, increase their knowledge; but will not penetrate beyond the vestibule of their mind, for want of interpreter to unlock the sanctuary within.

But if for our purpose we do not require more than human nature, neither can we put up with less. We cannot dispense with any of its essential contents. In order to build up a system of relations ethically organized, we must

start with men and not beasts; i.e. with beings not blindly thrust hither and thither by chance instincts, but conscious of difference in their impulses, and directed by concurrent intelligence. Take away this common base of harmony; suppose, with Hobbes, each individual set up for himself as a separate centre of repulsion, with an assertive appetite for all that he can touch, resolute to get all he can and surrender only what he must; and whatever equilibrium you may elicit from these data is not a moral equilibrium: it is but the Statics of desolating passion, not the Dynamics of ordered and unresting affections, and can only constitute, as Hobbes himself insisted, the enthronement of Force and the negation of all baffled Right. I will not say that no community could thus be formed and hold together, though even the gregarious habit of animals is not the product of mere self-love: but I do say that the bond on which it depends is not ethical or distinctively human; that it is the theatre of interests only and not of duties; and that its material—the mutilated essence of humanity—does not supply an adequate school for the unfolding of a private or public conscience.

Or shall I be corrected here, and asked to see in this material, not the "*mutilated*," but rather the *uncompleted and inchoate* essence of humanity? Will it be said that Hobbes, in omitting some elements which he need not have denied to our self-knowledge, only anticipated the theory of Evolution, and astutely surmised the process through which the brute nature had become the human? and have we to confess it as at least an established probability that the adequate cause of orderly society is the "primitive savage;"—of human rights, the violence of wrong;—of

thought, sensation;—of sensation, organic structure;—of organism, the inorganic; and so on through the stages of the "beautifully less," till we reach the zero, where plus and minus keep house together and become the Adam and Eve of all things? Be it so. For aught I know, the remote progenitor of a biped may be a quadruped, or a centipede: do you expect me then to place these creatures among moral beings? or to rank man with the unmoral? or to say that between moral and unmoral there is no real difference? Am I to think that when the conditions are provided which will set up an Ascidian, nothing more is wanted to make sure of an Aristotle and a Shakespeare, an Antonine and an Alfred the Great? I must decline to accept any such equation between the minimum of causation and the maximum of effect, and must supply in thought whatever is needed to cover the total difference, in quantity and quality, between the insignificant beginning and the majestic end. Whether the bodily forms which enshrine this enormous increment of creative power are of a million types or the continuity of one, is a question interesting to the naturalist, but in no way critical to the moral philosopher: the consciousness of guilt is just as far from toothache or hunger when lodged in the same type of organism with them, as when put into another invented for its sake. Let it appear when and where it may, it is a thing *sui generis*, which disowns an utterly heterogeneous source, and, though co-existing with dissimilar functions, can no more be deduced thence than vision from hearing. If you have nothing to work with but animal pleasures and pains, and unlimited time for their experience and transmission, you can never hope, through all eternity, to build up a conscience; or, if

you do, you build up what your data will not support, and you will have to let fall as an illusion. Inherited accumulation of expediencies may account for an ever quicker and finer and larger sense of expediency, but for nothing else; as an infinitude of sand-grains may make a shore and an infinitude of drops a sea, but neither effect can take the place of the other. Add as long as you will, if the items of the sum are all prudences, the total will not come out as a duty. To this truth Mr. Herbert Spencer himself bears conclusive witness: for, while he undertakes to show how, from sentient experiences, the idea of obligation obtains its *de facto* origin, he insists that *de jure* it has no business to be there; and that we should never have it, did we not misread our inward history, for want of his clear psychologic light. He gives its genesis in order to exhibit it, not as a legitimate derivative, but as a detected error; and accordingly infers that "the sense of duty or moral obligation is transitory" and "fades,"* like any other illusion. What more emphatic proclamation can be made that, operating with a merely animal and not a personal humanity, you can never justify the Ethical life or admit the possibility of an Ethical Science? For both have their very focus in this superseded sentiment of Duty; whence radiate all the affections characteristic of the one, and all the lines of meaning which define the language of the other. Instead of discrediting the highest stage at present reached by our nature and putting faith only in its lowest groundwork of sense and impulse, we may reasonably invert the order, and estimate the beginning by the end, and refuse to treat the nature as present till the whole of it is there.

* Data of Ethics, p. 127.

But now let us suppose all these naturalistic theories and weakening conditions removed out of the way, and full play to be given, in a human society, to the ethical conditions and affections, in their present degree of maturity; and represent to ourselves the form of character which, in their isolation, they tend to produce. United with others in a common moral nature, we take for granted a fundamental agreement about right and wrong, and never hesitate, in case of apparent divergence, to rely on its removal by seeking coincidence at an earlier point. We regard ourselves, therefore, as all under a common rule by which each must be tried, and which is as little variable as any self-evident maxim of common sense, and by their several degrees of conformity to which or deviation from it we range men on the scale of righteousness or guilt. This rule, however, we are aware, is not an imperative definition of action, but a relative valuation of motive; and as the same preference of motive may give rise to any one of several acts, and the same act proceed from any one of several attitudes of motive, the conditions of the problem are always interior and out of sight: so that our judgments, if formed on *conduct* alone, are liable to go far astray: of its *wisdom or folly* we have a ready calculus in its *consequences;* its *goodness or guilt* we can only presume by surmising its invisible principle.

Judgment in other matters assumes no more than a determinate criterion of value: Ethical judgment assumes besides a personal power of conforming to it. To criticize an elm as awry and a man's stature as short, it is enough that you have the idea of a symmetrical tree and a well-proportioned figure: in criticizing another's character, you

presuppose that he has the true idea as well as you, and that it rests with him to realize it; that he knows his duty and can do it. It cannot be denied that the whole system of moral conceptions, feelings and language, rests upon the belief in Free Will, and deals with man as (within its particular range) the real cause of what he is and does. But for this, who could suffer compunction any more for a lie than for a squint, or shame for delirium tremens more than for a typhoid fever, or feel more indignant disgust at the crimes of a Cæsar Borgia than at the rapacity of a wolf? Remorse for sin would be impossible but for the consciousness that it lies at our door: and the blame with which we visit the guilt of another is measured by the merited self-reproaches of his own heart. It is vain to pretend that we praise and condemn, approve and disapprove, the acts of another in order to procure their repetition or arrest,—making an investment in good words with an eye to a suitable return: and that, except to modify the future, we should have no such feeling to express. These moral sentiments are distinctly retrospective, judicial sentences upon the past, and estimates of present character, and *not* a device for managing something yet to come: and their undoubted influence on the human will as incentives and restraints depends on their just estimate of what is irrevocably committed, and would be spoiled if they were understood to be a mere policy of expectation. The modern determinist frankly admits that the postulate of freedom does underlie the ordinary experiences and judgments of the Conscience; and only draws the conclusion—"So much the worse for them." Remorse, in his eyes, is an absurdity; repentance, a weakness; merit and demerit, with all the feelings they

excite, fancies due to our ignorance of causes; responsibility, a mistake, if it means more than that no act is without its consequences; and duty, an imaginary bond, unless understood simply of men's reasonable expectations from you. As these ideas and affections are such integral parts of the Ethical disposition that it is difficult to see what is left of it when they are gone, I cannot be wrong in setting down the faith in Free Will among its characteristics. Whether the faith is true or not, it is no part of my present purpose to inquire. But of its effect upon the side of our nature to which it attaches itself, an idea may be given by a pregnant remark of Spinoza's, that towards a being supposed to be free, affections far more intense will be felt than towards one under necessity.* If this be so, we must assign to the type of character we are considering, not only an extended range, but an exceptional energy, of affection.

If Ethics pure and simple have for their object the right-ordering of personal relations, then in the absence of personal relations they will have nothing to say. In proportion as action and feeling have only reflex influence upon ourselves, escaping all contact with the lives of others, we shall regard them, from this point of view, as not falling within the scope of duty, and shall assert our freedom from every claim. Not that the hypothesis of isolation can ever be completely realized till the world is composed of desert islands, with a man a piece: but there are various near approaches to lonely exercises of will, secret corners of the mind and life where others seem to have no right of entrance; and if there we take a dispensation from all that intermeddles with our self-regards, and assume an

* Ethica III. Pr. xlix.

unqualified independence, we shall not sensibly depart from our fundamental conception of morals. Every one must be conscious of at least occasional temptations to "do what he likes with his own;" and it is but an extension of this temper that is so often seen in the combination of strict honour and noble conscientiousness in public and social affairs with deplorable anarchy of personal habit.

For the group of ideas and affections hitherto described we need look no further than the experiences of human society. The peculiar cast of character which emerges from their dominance is singularly wholesome, the very staff of sustenance for the normal good of the world; not rich and rare, as the wine of genius or the fruits of art, but welcome as the "daily bread" which better fits our daily prayer and meets our constant need. The sense of Duty is to our humanity what gravitation is to the physical universe: and the solid natures in which it masses itself restrain whatever is erratic, and bend dependent minds into orderly movement. What counterpoise have we against the delirium of passion, the grasp of cupidity, the phthisis of romance, but the indomitable faithfulness of men who take no counsel but of their conscience, whom no pretences can beguile, no threats dismay, who look truth and right straight in the face, and, if they see a neglected duty, seize it for their own, "proniores ad officia, quod spernebantur"? These are the men who feel sure that, if a thing is right, it must be possible: and this faith in human causality, extinguishing the sense of difficulty, sweeps from their path the ideal obstacles which, far more than any substantial checks, arrest the energies of weaker natures. For the simply conscientious, no interval is visible, or even conceivable,

between perceiving the best and executing it. No line for them is so straight as that from thought to action. Doubtless, a mere sprinkling of such righteous souls may suffice at times to avert destruction from a perishing community.

At the same time, where the tension of conscience is pitched thus high, more is expected from the reason and moral sense of others than they will be found to give. He who simply wields his freedom does not understand the slavery of more ordinary minds: from the dependent he demands independence; from the frivolous, devotedness; from the self-indulgent, sacrifice. And when these exactions remain without response, he never suspects that he has laid too heavy a trust upon the hampered and sickened human causality, but pours out reproaches on the apathy and shortcomings of others. Seeing only what might have been had they but done their part, he criticizes and scolds, and contracts a temper censorious and unsympathetic, with scarcely hope enough to sustain his unaided fidelity. His disappointment in their perversity does but increase the rigidity of his own convictions: losing all tenderness and gaining no humility, he falls out of tune with the affections and wills that are his sole allies. He cannot reach the hearts of men. He wonders how it is that his moral reforms make so little way. He has shown their reasonableness: the proof is complete: assent is not refused: but somehow the springs of power are not there! To what degree of repulsiveness this type of character may descend, can be unknown only to the happy few who have never met with the rational and ethical prig who has alighted upon some short cut to the perfection of the world, and

goes about offering with solemn assurance the universal pill that is to cure our sins and reinstate us to-morrow in Paradise. Many a projector of this order has it been my lot to know. With adequate self-complacency, he is perhaps the most comfortable, but the dreariest of mortals; persuaded that he has the secret of omnipotence, and smitten with utter ineffectiveness; for ever turning the barrel of a dead organ which has no tune to any but himself. It would be a relief if he would but be angry at his failure, curse the evils he cannot heal, and take offence at the nature of things which baffles him. Give me rather the passionate invective of the pessimist, who at least is moved by pity to his defiance, and, if he cannot have the universe on his side, is content to spend himself in struggling against it on behalf of suffering humanity. Better to remonstrate, like Job, with the order of nature, than, like his friends, to ignore it: thus far its Infinite Author is "a Jealous God;" He will sooner bear to be denounced than to be forgot.

Why is it that pure moral ideas may result in so imperfect a type of character, and moral reforms in effects so feeble? What is amiss with them? Are they not true? Are they not good? Whence then their impotence? Yes, they are both; but, so long as the horizon of humanity shuts in their view, there is a larger truth, there is an infinite good, beyond their little field of vision, the light and warmth of which no sooner flow in than they kindle both the seer and the seen with a new glow, turning assent into enthusiasm, and suffusing a rugged world with divine beauty. The affections hitherto noticed arise from the contemplation of *human* causality, and receive their shock because they have not reckoned with the boundless store

beyond, and are confused by its inrush upon their schemes. The Conscience, as thus far regarded, has played the part of righteous judge between man and man, never doubting that its right-ordering of personal relations was herein complete; and if its judgments have been uttered with too little majesty of voice, and have gained but faint obedience from listening hearts, may it not be because there is one personal relation left unrealized,—the crown and interpreter of all,—their inward sanctity, their embracing glory? If Ethics are to cover the entire ground of *character*, and if in our character there be a part which has reference to the Infinitude which surrounds our life, a system of thought, a type of feeling, which omits this part and treats it as though it were not, can be but a truncated moral structure, resembling the whole much as a Gothic Hôtel de Ville resembles a cathedral without its transepts and its towers.

So long as Duty is regarded as a human self-enactment, it involves no personal relations except of men *inter se*. Treated as a factor in our egoistic psychology, the idea is taken as merely subjective and coming from ourselves. Treated as a social product fastened upon each individual by his fellows, it comes from our equals. In the former case, it ranks with any other phenomenon of our history: in the other, it stands on the level of a coercion or a convention among associates. In neither case does it speak to us from a superior, or carry in it any imperative right. If it is the voice of our fellows, it may be louder, but is not auguster than our own; if it is an altercation between two desires of the self, each may contradict the other without making good its title to command the whole. Within a unit, or where life is all upon one plane, Obligation cannot

be, but only conflict and equilibrium of Force; and hence the fatal weakness of the Moralist who, after planting our nature in this position, continues to talk of what it *ought* to be. He eviscerates Duty, and turns it into a mummy, and then expects it to get up and walk. It is the total failure of a Supreme Authority, not of compelling strength but of pleading Perfection, that paralyzes him, and constrains him to fly before the first fanatic mob that sweeps the field in the name of the Holy Ghost. The law which he asserts, another can deny; and that which is made by men to-day may be unmade by men to-morrow; and no preacher of such shifting relativity of truth and righteousness will ever speak home to the undying needs of the human conscience.

Is he then forbidden by veracity to speak in any higher name than his own? In his private controversies of temptation, when the argument is at its height between some splendid treachery and a guiltless ignominy, is the difference between them preached to him in his own name? Did he institute it? Was it his will that planted it out visibly in the frame of things and the hearts of men? Is his consciousness of it simply a play to and fro of his particular ideas, and their eager polemic only a soliloquy? Is it not rather a reality,—an eternal reality,—that looks in upon him and speaks to him? And has he not to own in it an *Authority* which is so far from being of his setting up, that his whole personality bows in homage to it,—an authority so different from mere Power, that Omnipotence itself could neither create nor cancel it? Now *authority* expresses a relation, not between mind and things, but between mind and mind: no physical object,

no unconscious phenomenon, can exercise it: it is a purely personal attribute, a tie of dependence between the higher and the lower; and, wherever it is felt, there are two minds present with each other in uplooking and uplifting attitude. Thus in the ultimate penetralia of the conscience the Living Spirit of God himself is met, it may be unconsciously, it may be consciously. If you enter with the spiritual eye blindfolded, you will not indeed be wholly disappointed of your oracle; but, in receiving it and taking it away, you will suppose yourself alone: you will keep it as a precept of wisdom, and approve it as you might a proverb of Solomon's, and, in commending it to others, will look out for logic to support it. But the very soul of it will escape you, because it is one term of a personal relation, of which the other remains hidden from you. If, on the other hand, you have discovered on what holy ground you stand, you will issue forth in quite another mood: you will have, not a proposition to prove, but a message to deliver; and, fresh from the communion with the Infinite Inspirer, you will speak "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes."

The moment the experiences of Conscience are recognized as a personal relation, the whole body of Morals starts up as in life from the dead, and becomes transfigured with light flashing from the contact of two worlds. In height, in depth, in volume, in sanctity, in tenderness, they are hardly less changed than the mortal putting on his immortality. Take only the following particulars.

1. The *Authority* of Duty becomes transcendent and Divine; and we understand how it is that it always gazed at us with so awful and quickening an eye, as if to fix our

look, and still to pursue us though we turned away. This is intelligible, if it be the meeting of spirit with spirit, the living touch of infinite holiness on finite temptation. But no absent power, no code of the past, no heaven or hell of the future, could draw from us such secret homage: where and when the worship is, there and then is the God. If previously it was the tendency of moral conviction to harden our independence of will and impart a Stoical rigour, this temper, which belongs only to our standing before men or Fate, must now give way, and be replaced by pure reverence and self-surrender, not to resistless Force, but to Highest Righteousness.

2. The *Scope* of Duty becomes for the first time co-extensive with the area of the Will. There is a considerable range of voluntary life for every one, where all his fellows are out of reach, or at least so faintly and remotely affected by what he feels and does, as to obtain no voice in it. This field of private thought, of individual habit, of lonely taste and occupation, it has always been difficult to reclaim from the anarchy of chance desires, or the forbidding enclosure of selfishness, and annex it to the domain of Duty. To effect this, recourse has been had to such empty fictions as that of "Duty to ourselves;" which can be saved from contradiction only by an impossibility, viz. the splitting of "ourselves" into two agents susceptible of reciprocal obligations. The moment you fix any real sense upon the phrase, its meaning becomes simply *Prudence*, the neglect of which may constitute a solitary man a fool, but not a criminal. All this is changed in a moment on finding that we are never alone and deserted by personal relations; that when finite agents leave us, the Infinite remains; that in

every consciousness of a better and a worse, his living Perfection is in converse with us, and, stripping us of arbitrary option, imparts to our selection a character of faithfulness or guilt. There is nothing, in short, to which this one transcendent personal relation does not penetrate. The whole order of the life and mind, even in the deepest solitude, feels its supervision. And matters of which even good men are apt to be heedless, e.g. the limits of time and degree within which permissible desires and pursuits,—of wealth, of society, of ease and ornament, of knowledge and accomplishment,—may rightly have their way, are no longer left unregulated. A sacred light is interfused with our being from centre to circumference, and, where human affections cease to direct our path, gleams through the air and leads us on.

3. The *Volume*, or internal capacity, of the Moral Life is immeasurably expanded by gaining its religious interpretation. If it be the theme of converse between the Divine and the human mind and the expression of their affinity our faith in Righteousness bursts the bounds of anthropology and assumes a kosmical extension. No escape from terrestrial conditions supersedes it: no withdrawal of limits from the mind would render it obsolete: for here it is, present at once in its two extremes,—at its beginning and in its consummation, born in the finite nature from the communion of the Infinite; inexhaustible, therefore, through the gradations of approach from the one to the other. And however surprising this may seem so long as moral excellence is looked at only in the concrete form of its external offices, it becomes intelligible when we follow up character to its interior essence, and find its perfection to consist in

a certain order and harmony among the spiritual springs of action. However long a mind may live, however large its powers may grow, this harmony, this ascendency of the best, may become more nearly perfect, or in its perfection, if that be possible, cover a wider field. The conscience carries in its very nature a secret suspicion of this measureless possibility of goodness, and feels the presence of the vision even through its grievous blindness: hence, in uncorrupted natures, its undying humility, its inextinguishable aspiration. The moral sense, neglected and abused, may no doubt sink away, and on its lower line of movement die out in the dark; but, exercising its normal function on the upper line, it touches no terminus and dreams of none. Its intensest speed it deems intolerably slow: if it have feet, it longs for wings: if it have wings, it envies the lightning: it has always spaces to traverse which it cannot overtake. This ideal infinitude of excellence for our mind is but the reflex of its real infinitude for the Supreme Mind.

4. The *Enthusiasm* of the Moral Life is intensified by the consciousness of its Divine Source. That it is the meeting-ground of kindred sympathy between our nature and God's, where he lets us into the confidences of his thought and the partnership of his causality, is in itself enough to glorify the human characteristics and to endear the Divine, and kindle the zeal for bringing them into harmony. But, over and above this general tendency, there is a provision, in the inward constitution of our conscience, which gives a special impulse in the same direction. It sees the springs of action in a certain order of rank in excellence,—an order that speaks the preferences of God. And among the terms at the summit of that scale are Com-

passion, Sympathy, Wonder (devotion to truth), and Reverence (devotion to goodness); in short, the group (name the members as you will) of disinterested and spiritual affections whence all fruitful inspiration has ever burst upon the world. These, then, are the fountains of life most dear to the Soul of souls: and those are most like him whose energies, detained by no inner frosts, flow freely forth in streams of Love that nourish the roots of every human good. The Ethical spirit is often supposed to be cold and scrupulous and negatively correct, shrinking from innumerable things and worshipping nothing. In its period of critical legalism, prior to its new birth, it may be so; but once sweetened with the waters of regeneration and initiated into its Divine relations, it breathes the air of quite another world; discovers that the best vigilance against evil is to fling yourself away into some humane and purifying good; and, since the life of God is the life of love, gains assurance that, with an infinite ally, the battle of righteousness can never lose hope and heart. The grievous features of the human lot which, in the natural stage, produce only dejection, become, in the spiritual, an impelling power. The sadness of the actual to so many sufferers, when touched by faith in their latent possibilities, lets in a kindling air, and turns the mournful smoke into a living flame. And the inequalities of men, which once seemed to be stereotyped by nature in caste, in serfdom, in slavery, and to close the door upon the future, no sooner catch the transforming light of the common human responsibility, than they wake the justice of converted souls, and shame the former pride and scorn, and raise vast armies of compassion intent on rescue, and penetrate life with mutual respect.

Such, then, I take to be the connection between Ethics and Religion; the latter, as containing the Supreme Personal Relation, completing the former, and, in doing so, transfiguring it throughout. The attempt of our own age to separate the two, and prove that it makes no difference to Morals what theory we adopt, or whether any at all, respecting the universe beyond our own nature, is full of pathetic interest, as expressing an anxious resolve, amid the disintegration of other faiths, to save at least the minimum of conditions for our orderly life with one another. But, intellectually, this excellent motive does not excuse so great a paradox. It is simply impossible to be indifferent to the kind of Power which presides over the system of things; and the choice practically lies between two conceptions,—Necessity and Will,—the one blind, the other with moral ends. Whichever you adopt carries with it a train of consequences direct into the sphere of our experience.

Blind Necessity on the throne of the Universe means submission without law (for "Necessity has no law"); internecine war through the whole field of life; equilibrium, attained on the line of least resistance; society, suspended upon a truce; every nation, a camp; every individual, a sentinel against rivals; the strong, hunting the weak and laughing their saviours to scorn; history, reduced to a perpetual "massacre of the innocents;" and morals, to a persistent getting what you can and doing what you must.

Righteousness on the throne of the Universe means the subordination of might to right; concord, composed out of the varieties of life; equilibrium, effected by concurrent attractions; society, resting on the common recognition of

a binding law; every nation, a province of the "kingdom of God;" every individual, a member of a "Sacred band;" the strong, bearing the burdens of the weak, and the weak holding on to the rear of the strong; history, an "Education of the human race;" and morals, the Divine ideal which that education is to work out.

I do not deny that each of these theories may cite phenomena that seem to countenance it; but I affirm that the characteristic phenomena of the Moral world are compatible only with the second, and must be dismissed as illusions before it can be dislodged. Is any one to be listened to who says that this would make no difference?

Religion can as little afford to forget its emergence from the Conscience, as the Conscience to shrink from its religious transfiguration. The essence of Religion lies in communion between the finite and the Infinite Mind, between the individual Soul and the Universal. Where this communion is based specifically on the Ethical consciousness, it is a felt relation between Will and Will, a harmony or discord between Spirit and Spirit, in which two free Causalities are in presence of each other, in the light or under the cloud. Here, the human Personality asserts itself in the very moment and by the very act of surrender and abnegation, and never rises into higher liberty than when sinking into identification with the supreme intent. But if you quit this unique ground of *Moral* experience, and for any other side of your nature throw open the windows to the Infinite, the overwhelming inrush of the Primary Causality will utterly drown the secondary, abolish the conditions of personality, and dissolve all detached existence in the deified cloud with which

the Mystic fills all space. The imagination, brooding on the fixed idea that "the All is only One," sees the lines of difference melt away, and accepts all states, outward and inward, as equally Divine; treats all moral distinctions as wiped out from the nature of things; and all objects alike, conscious or unconscious, as passive vehicles of the same necessitating Power. I will not urge that Religion, being the communion between two, commits suicide when, by merging one, it passes into a speculative Monism. But I dwell simply on the fact of the utter denudation, by these floods of Divine Necessity, of the whole ground on which Ethics stood: so that, if Religion can be said to remain, it cannot be a religion of *Duty*. It is true that the Mystic, in losing *himself*, is freed from a copious source of human sins. But it is a negative deliverance, even if it lasts beyond his meditative moments; and it secures nothing better to take the place. According as his nature tends to thought, to affection, to art, he will dissolve himself away in speculation, in love, or in beauty, without a regulative order for his personal relations, or capacity for concrete action. These precarious drifts of emotion involve great danger to character. No greater gift do we owe to Christianity than the conception and consecration of *Personality:* and every influence that confuses and disturbs it softens the very nerve of modern civilization.

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